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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1391
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3483
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0976
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 002924

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/17/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [PINR](#) [ID](#)
SUBJECT: A CABINET OF ONE -- INDONESIA'S FIRST LADY EXPANDS
HER INFLUENCE

REF: A. JAKARTA 1059
[1](#)B. JAKARTA 271
[1](#)C. 06 JAKARTA 13526

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4(b,d).

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY: According to contacts, Indonesia's First Lady has expanded her influence within the Palace and emerged as the President's undisputed top advisor. Kristiani Herawati's ascendance has apparently come at the expense of other key advisors. The First Lady has allegedly leveraged her access to the President to help her friends and disparage her foes, including Vice President Kalla. While unconfirmed rumors of the First Lady's business relationships continue to float around Jakarta, there is little evidence to support accusations that she has enriched herself at the public trough. There is also no evidence that the First Lady has exerted her influence on foreign policy issues. END SUMMARY.

A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

[1](#)2. (S) Complaints about the First Lady's role in Palace affairs emerged almost as soon as President Yudhoyono assumed office in 2004. According to a host of Mission contacts, Ibu Ani--as she is known in Indonesia--quickly demonstrated a tendency to weigh in on policy, politics, and personnel matters. The President's advisors privately grumbled about her unseen influence in the decision-making process, but there was at least a sense in the early days of the administration that her voice was only one of the many President Yudhoyono listened to during his lengthy deliberations on matters of state.

[1](#)3. (S) Over the course of the last year or so, contacts have reported that the balance of power within the Palace has shifted palpably in Ibu Ani's direction. As Presidential Advisor T.B. Silalahi told poloff in Ref B, members of the President's staff increasingly feel marginalized and powerless to provide counsel to the President. Silalahi, for example, told poloff that his cousin, Presidential Cabinet Secretary Sudi Silalahi, almost resigned in January out of

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frustration with the new Palace dynamic.

¶4. (S) According to Dadan Irawan, a high-level Golkar official (Golkar is the largest party in Indonesia), Ibu Ani has moved to restrict access to the President -- even among members of the Presidential Staff and the newly formed Presidential Advisory Board (Ref A). Dadan told poloff that by strengthening her gate-keeping role, the First Lady was able to expose the President to views and policy perspectives of her own choosing. According to Yahya Asagaf, a political appointee at the State Intelligence Agency (BIN), it was also becoming more obvious that the First Lady's opinion was "the only one that matters."

A DISTINCT ECHO?

¶5. (S) According to family friend Ridwan Soeriyadi, the First Lady's influence could partially be explained as a by-product of the President's own cautiousness and his understandable skepticism of his advisors' motives. Ridwan told poloff that Ibu Ani was the only person the President could truly trust on every issue, and as the President moved into the second half of his term, he was increasingly moving in lock-step with his wife. Ridwan likened Yudhoyono's relationship with Ibu Ani to former president Suharto's relationship with his wife, and believed that on some level Yudhoyono possibly viewed Suharto's relationship as a kind of model for his own presidency (SBY worked closely with the former president during his military career).

HELPING FRIENDS AND PUNISHING FOES

¶6. (S) Dadan Irawan told poloff that Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Aburizal Bakrie was perhaps the most obvious beneficiary of the First Lady's Palace role. According to Dadan, after the President demoted Bakrie from his perch atop the Coordinating Ministry for the Economy in

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late 2005, Bakrie immediately launched a charm offensive on the First Lady to try and work his way back into the President's good graces. Dadan reported that over the first half of 2006, Bakrie assiduously ingratiated himself with the First Lady and her family; Bakrie's strategic courtship apparently worked in spades. Not only did Bakrie somehow manage to weather the East Java mud-flow debacle initiated by his Lapindo Bras Corporation, but he has also steadily increased his profile within the administration

¶7. (S) If Bakrie's approach represents the model blueprint for managing relations with the First Lady, Vice President Kalla's frosty association with Ibu Ani undoubtedly sits at the other end of the spectrum. By all accounts, the First Lady actively loathes the Vice President and has launched a not-so-secret campaign to have him replaced at the bottom of the 2009 ticket. The Vice President has apparently evinced little interest in improving his relationship with her. This decision may ultimately come at a cost for Kalla, however, as Mission contacts uniformly agree the First Lady will have a major say in whether or not the SBY-Kalla pairing stays together in 2009 (see septel).

ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION

¶8. (S) As Ibu Ani's influence has expanded, so too has the list of her enemies both inside and outside the Palace. Accusations of corruption have dogged her since Yudhoyono first assumed office, and Ibu Ani's enemies have increasingly worked to spread rumors about her in the intervening years. Most of the rumors are short on specifics, however, and generally seem to gain currency primarily because of the First Family's modest financial means. (Note: The President spent the bulk of his career in the military, while the First Lady herself comes from a well-known military family. Neither of their families is considered to be very wealthy.)

Yudhoyono's supporters and adversaries both recognize this core financial vulnerability and rumors that Ibu Ani may be exploiting the presidency to address this issue seem to gain traction as a result. Nevertheless, at this point there is no evidence to substantiate any of the rumors involving the First Lady.

NO INTEREST IN FOREIGN POLICY

19. (S) There is no indication that the First Lady has an abiding interest in foreign policy or holds any strong views toward the United States; her influence would seem to reside primarily in the domestic political sphere. While she accompanies her husband on foreign trips, she rarely travels internationally on her own and apparently has little interest in serving as a GOI envoy on any international issues. Likewise, we have never heard of foreign diplomats trying to meet with her to influence issues and--though she is accessible at receptions--she tends to steer clear of substantive exchanges with foreigners.

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